

Conclusion



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Historically, agricultural and food issues were initially inseparable but over the last century they have been dealt with as separate entities to an increasing extent. Food issues are often incorporated in agricultural policies in countries where the economy has long been dominated by the primary sector. Most populations hampered by food insecurity in these countries are rural and agriculture-oriented, and this slice of the population is proportionately in the majority. Food insecurity there is conventionally considered to be due to an insufficient food supply, so increasing agricultural production is the main strategy adopted to fight hunger.

In countries with a longer history of industrialization, food was always a major policy domain for cities until the issue was taken up by the States. The latter intervened to ensure food security (stocks, price regulation) and food safety (regulation, control), while providing the most vulnerable people with access to at least a minimum amount of quality food (food aid). States then partially withdrew their involvement when the liberalization trend took off in the late twentieth century and they handed over the task of fulfilling urban food supplies to agrifood logistics, processing and distribution companies. Meanwhile, States maintained control over food health safety. Food security in these countries was relatively well maintained from a quantitative standpoint, but State agricultural policies continued to support agriculture, which in turn became more of an economic sector whose competitiveness had to be bolstered in an aggressive international environment.

The pattern of implementation of agricultural and food policies at the urban level has actually differed from that of other urban policies. These two ‘worlds’ have more or less ignored each other, leading to a clearcut urban-rural divide. Urban policymaking on food issues—which has been taking place in both industrialized and so-called ‘developing’ countries in recent years—seeks to bridge this divide.

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In this respect, it is crucial to take the territorial scale into account when drawing up urban food policies. Such policies may tend to limit city interventions solely to the immediate territory (almost entirely urbanized), with the risk of overlooking relationships with outlying agricultural areas that meet cities' food supply needs and with which they have *de facto* links. These links are generally not identified—cities are often unable to draw up maps of the agricultural areas that supply them. Conversely, urban conurbations, which encompass communities located in the vicinity of the city and where agriculture is a major territorial component, often integrate both food and agricultural issues. If from a hypothetical standpoint we consider that the urban world is made up mainly of consumers and the rural world of farmers, we still cannot assume that urban dwellers will essentially be concerned by food issues and rural dwellers by agricultural issues. The contrary pattern is revealed when looking at conurbations—which incorporate both worlds—where rural people are also concerned by food issues (e.g. food deserts and malnutrition), while agricultural issues (urban crop and livestock farming) are also on the minds of urban dwellers. This is the case in metropolitan Montpellier (France) which has implemented an 'agroecology and food policy', so these two key elements are dovetailed. Urban policymaking regarding food issues will be more relevant if territories that combine both urban and rural geographical spaces are taken into consideration. Moreover, the promotion of the city region food systems (CRFS) concept by many actors reflects an intention to bridge these rural-urban and agriculture-food divides.

Many urban food policies are currently aimed at relinking the two worlds by relocating food production to feed cities. Some cities even intend to achieve food self-sufficiency in their territories. Historically, it is nevertheless known that large cities were built using supplies procured from remote lands. With a few exceptions, due to the size of cities, it would be wishful thinking to strive for self-sufficiency based on sourcing food supplies solely from lands within the immediate vicinity of these urban areas. Although food self-sufficiency with regard to vegetable, egg or poultry supplies could be imagined, this would be hard to achieve for other foods given the size of cities and the quantities involved—cereals, roots, tubers, legumes, meat, fish, oil and sugar, for instance, could not be solely produced in the urban hinterland. The urban food policy challenge is thus to consider food systems on a broader scale than just urban and periurban territories:

- from a geographical viewpoint, taking into account agricultural production areas that feed the city, even when they are remote, as well as processing, logistics and urban waste recycling areas;
- from a political viewpoint, because the food sector in cities is currently largely shaped by national policies, regional (CAP in Europe, NAFTA in North and Central America, ECOWAS in West Africa, etc.) and international (e.g. WTO) agreements, and by major processing, distribution and catering companies.

Urban food policy councils are usually composed of representatives of local institutions, but the question arises as to how cities could interact with non-local

institutions that nevertheless have a major influence on food supplies for their communities. This is one of the issues tackled by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact initiative, which includes over a hundred cities from around the world that are building more sustainable food system policies. The aim—through a federated city movement—is to interact with national, regional or global bodies whose remit extends well beyond the territory of individual cities.

The complex, interwoven, multifactorial and multidimensional aspects of urban policymaking on agricultural and food issues are clearcut. In this book, we opted to not present a holistic and integrative conceptual framework of all aspects of this policymaking (of varied and sometimes contradictory interest). Instead we propose a framework that reconciles the different policymaking pathways by focusing on: solving the food problems at hand; marshalling levers that local urban governments have available to tackle the food issue; or (but to a lesser extent) setting food policymaking as a primary objective. These pathways are obviously not linear, finished or definitive, instead they should be taken as an aggregate of linked combinations, as clearly highlighted by Caroline Brand in her doctoral thesis. Awareness of these formulated policymaking pathways could quickly convince urban actors that food management is essential, while helping them understand that they have actually been dealing with food in separate silos ‘without knowing it’. Their mobilization on this cross-cutting issue will then be stronger than if they were to create a new integrative silo, which could stifle some of their prerogatives. The debate that is presently under way—to which this book contributes—has already pinpointed several issues that research teams specialized on this topic intend to deal with in the future.

The first issue concerns a key urban food system actor that surprisingly is not yet at the forefront in the debate—the urban population, i.e. the consumers or ‘eaters’. Very little is known and published about their practices and representations, particularly to help gain insight into their impacts on food system sustainability. The literature is geared more towards supply chains and food supply organization than towards practices in the domestic sphere, i.e. households. How do urban food policies affect them? New approaches focused on the factors that determine food styles recognize the role of the physical and economic environment in behavioural changes. This innovative field of research explores the effects of the foodscape and urban food environment—which in turn is shaped by cities—on food behaviours and representations.

The second issue concerns the political role of cities in food system management at broader scales and, conversely, concerns the impacts of these national, regional or global food systems on urban policy—are they synergistic or antagonistic? What degree of latitude is there for urban policymaking on food issues?

Finally, the third set of issues concerns innovations that make effective use of urban resources. Cities give rise to specific problems regarding food system sustainability. The resources they channel could however be promoted to help solve these problems. The growing number of urban innovations concerning ways to produce or

gain access to food—through trade or other alternative (e.g. collaborative) means—or even ways to cook and eat, reflects an inclination towards the gradual invention of new food systems. The challenge here is to mobilize research, no longer to conduct laboratory analyses on responses to major sustainability challenges (also defined in the laboratory), but rather to co-build and support these innovations on the basis of what motivates the actors that manage them, while assessing their effects on sustainability. Research can therefore help promote the capacity of cities to overcome food system sustainability issues and ensure that they will no longer hamper this process.

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